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**NRDC Calls on EPA to Crack Down  
On Oil Refinery Air Pollution  
*New Study Finds Refineries Fail to Report or Repair  
Valve Leaks of Millions of Pounds of Harmful Pollutants Annually***

WASHINGTON (November 9, 1999) – A national environmental organization today called on the Environmental Protection Agency to force U.S. oil refineries to detect, report and repair leaking valves as required by the Clean Air Act. A report released today by the minority staff of the U.S. House Committee on Government Reform reveals that oil refineries vastly underreport leaks of dangerous air pollutants, and that these "fugitive emissions" add millions of pounds of pollutants into the air every year. The report was requested by Rep. Henry Waxman (D-Calif.).

"We've known for many years that pollution emissions from refineries are among the nation's worst," says Linda E. Greer, PhD, a senior scientist with the Natural Resources Defense Council. "Refineries pump out more volatile organic compounds – a smog precursor – than any other type of factory and also are top sources for sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxides, as well as particulate matter and other toxic pollutants. It's an outrage that the average leak rate at these refineries is nearly four times higher than the levels they report. These companies need to take aggressive action to cut their pollution."

Refineries are the single largest industrial source of benzene in the air, and one of the top three emitters of xylenes, methyl ethyl ketone and toluene. Benzene is a known human carcinogen that also causes aplastic anemia, which interferes with the production of red and white blood cells in the bone marrow. Low levels of exposure to methyl ethyl ketone, a neurotoxin, hampers memory and slows reaction times. Similarly, exposure to xylene and toluene – both neurotoxins – leads to symptoms resembling drunkenness, including slowed reaction time and poor balance, and depression of the central nervous system. Long-term exposure to toluene may lead to kidney and liver damage.

The report notes that refineries can control these emissions at minimal cost. Often all that is required is tightening a valve with a wrench. "This is not rocket science. It's the technical equivalent of a homeowner fixing a leaking bathroom faucet," says Greer. "The value of the chemicals emitted into the air alone should easily pay the salary of the worker needed to inspect and tighten the leaky valves."

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The Natural Resources Defense Council is a national, non-profit organization of scientists, lawyers and environmental specialists dedicated to protecting public health and the environment. Founded in 1970, NRDC has more than 400,000 members nationwide, served by offices in New York, Washington, Los Angeles and San Francisco. More information on NRDC is available at its Web site, [www.nrdc.org](http://www.nrdc.org).